

Faculty Job Search: Interviewing

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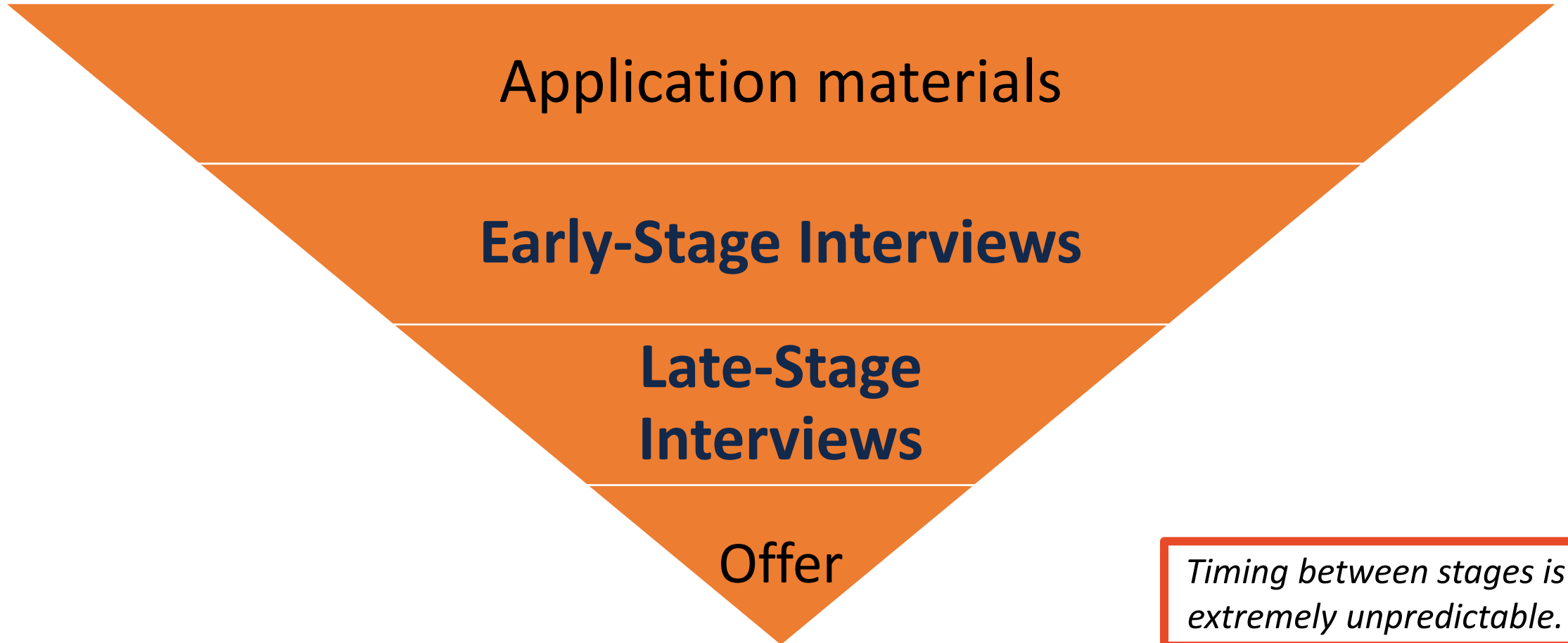
Assistant Dean for Career & Professional Development

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Note on This Workshop

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Application Process



Timing between stages is extremely unpredictable.

Goals for Faculty Interviews

Department / University

- Assess qualifications beyond application materials
- Assess tenurability & contribution (*Could this person get tenure here? Would this person take our department in a useful direction?*)
- Assess fit (*Would this person be a good colleague?*)

Candidate

- Learn more about the campus/department
- Expand on qualifications beyond application materials
- Assess fit (*Would I want to live and work/live here?*)

Early-Stage Interviews

Structure/Format

- Typically 20-60 minutes with search committee (2-? people)
- Mostly questions for you
- Some time at end for questions from you
- Rarely includes a presentation component
 - More common in Engineering fields (but still uncommon)

Logistics: Before the Interview

- Ask for committee names
- Ask for alternative contact information

Logistics: Setup

- Where?
 - At home
 - Departmental space (conference rooms)
 - University space (try [Illini Spaces](#))
 - Test spaces and connections in advance!

Logistics: Performance

- Dress up
 - Even for phone interview
- Look primarily at the camera
- Some notes are okay
 - Very minimal, especially for phone
 - Try post-its with keyword reminders

Logistics: After the Interview

- Take thorough notes
 - Questions asked
 - Surprises
 - Impressions of the department and its priorities
- Send a thank you note

Answering Questions

General Strategies

- Thought process and organization are important
- Connect answer with institution
- Be positive, clear, and specific
- Tell stories/give examples
- Pay attention to time
 - ~1-3 minutes for most answers

Guaranteed Question Topics

- Questions about research
- Questions about teaching
- Questions about “fit” with institution

See sample questions in “Faculty Interview Questions” handout

Strategies: Research Questions

- Not everyone is an expert in your subfield
- Communicate the significance, contribution, and impact of your work clearly
- Be prepared to discuss research trajectory and plans
- Be prepared to discuss practicalities: funding, mentoring, publication plans, etc.

Strategies: Teaching Questions

- Provide examples of how you have taught in the past
- Be prepared to discuss how you would teach Course X
 - Moderate level of specificity: Overall structure/purpose, example unit or assignment, general learning outcomes
- Demonstrate understanding of campus population
- How does your approach fit with the mission and resources of the institution?

Strategies: Fit Questions

- Be prepared for “Why do you want to work at X?”
- Do your research
 - Job posting, department website, university website, recent news articles, strategic plans, etc.
- Show excitement about their particular context
 - Especially important for liberal arts colleges and teaching-intensive institutions

Questions for Them

- Ask *positive* questions inspired by genuine curiosity
- What do you like best about working in this department?
- How would you describe the culture of the department?
- What opportunities exist to support collaboration with _____ unit on campus?
- What do majors in your department do after graduation?

Next Steps

1. Map out answers to the big questions
 - a) Tell us about your dissertation
 - b) What is your research agenda for the next 5 years
 - c) What is your teaching philosophy
2. Brainstorm stories and examples
3. Start practicing (out loud!)
4. Get feedback

Prep now!

*Then tailor to position after
an interview invitation*

Tools for Practicing Out Loud

- Big Interview Practice Video Interview
 - Details in “[Faculty Interviews: Practicing Out Loud](#)” handout
- Career Advising Appointment
 - Make an appointment at <https://grad.illinois.edu/careers/advising>

Late-Stage Interviews

AKA “Campus Visits” or “Campus Interviews”

Comprehensive Interview

- 1-3 days long, usually on campus
- Typically 2-5 finalists
- Many different elements

Common Elements

Research talk

Teaching demonstration

Individual meetings with faculty

Interview with search committee

Meetings with administrators

Meetings with students

Meals

More

Research Talk - Content

- What makes your work interesting and important?
- Show overall profile/trajectory & impact
 - Not just dissertation
 - Mix big-picture and specifics
- Make it accessible to people outside your subfield
 - Your goal is *not* to overwhelm them with your brilliance
- Use slides thoughtfully
 - Clear structure/outline

Always follow their instructions!

Introduction

- Big picture research agenda
- Motivation, position in field, etc
- Clear structure for rest of talk

Past/Current Work

- Quick overview
- Zoom in (specific project & specific impact)
- Connect to motivation for next

Research Plans

- Overall trajectory
- Map of specific directions
- Deep dive on ~1 direction

One Possible Structure (STEM/Exp SocSci)

Proportions will depend on your field and career stage—ask mentors!

Introduction

- Big picture research agenda
- Motivation, position in field, etc
- Clear structure for rest of talk

Dissertation/ Book Project

- Quick overview
- Zoom in (specific chapter & specific impact)
- Zoom back out

Future Work

- Second project
- Return to big picture research agenda

One Possible Structure (Hum/SS)

*Proportions will depend
on your field and career
stage—ask mentors!*

Research Talk - Delivery

- Who will be in the audience?
 - Faculty from what departments? Students (grad, undergrad)?
- Presentation/communication matters
 - Inferring teaching skills
- Stay under the time limit
 - Clarify how much time should be left for questions
- Practice!
 - Often, out loud, with an audience when possible

Research Talk - Q&A

- Anticipate likely questions
 - What questions do you often hear from colleagues?
 - What are some limitations of your work?
- Approach Q&A as a conversation with colleagues
- Assume everyone is acting in good faith
- Prepare how you will answer a question you don't know
 - Stay positive. Think *with* them.

Teaching Demonstration

- What's the context?
 - Existing class or separate presentation or _____?
 - Audience: faculty, students, both?
- What's the content?
- What format makes most sense given context and content?
 - Tailor structure to topic, context, kind of institution
- Practice often, out loud

Always follow their instructions!

Meetings with Faculty

Strategies:

- Do your research and anticipate priorities
- No need to read every paper (but know something about their work)
- Approach as a conversation among colleagues
- Ask lots of questions

Meetings with Administrators

*Department
chair, dean,
provost,
president...*

- Do your research
 - Their background; Institution mission statement; Strategic plans
- Keep strategic priorities in mind
- Prepare
 - Accessible research description
 - Questions (especially re: future directions, goals/aspirations, etc.)
 - What can you contribute to institution?
- Discuss tenure/promotion expectations (mostly with chair)
- STEM: Be ready for start-up conversation
 - But try to keep it relatively general

Meetings with Students

- Focus on them: their insights, their needs, etc.
- Ask lots of questions
 - What have been your favorite classes?
 - What do you like best about being a student here?
 - What would you like to see the department do more?
- Use what you learn in meetings with faculty and administrators

Meals

*Likely with faculty;
possibly with students*

- Not likely in 2020-21, but may still happen over video
- Remember: it's part of the interview
- Ask questions (good opportunity to go less formal)
 - What do you like best about teaching here?
 - Where do you live in town?
 - What do you think is the most interesting thing about the institution?

Big Tip: Have a Huge List of Questions

Questions you can ask almost anyone:

- What do you like best about working here?
- How has the college/university changed since you started?
- How do you see the department/college/university changing in the next five years?
- What surprised you most when you started working here?
- What's your favorite thing about the students who take your classes?
- How would you describe the department's culture?
- What would you say are some of the challenges facing the department/college/university right now?

After the Interview

- Send thank you notes
 - To everyone you had substantive conversation with
- Take thorough notes to help you reflect:
 - Do you want to work there?
 - What would you need to succeed in the position?

How can
we help?

Keep Your Options Open

- Start exploring other career options *now*
 - [A strategy for how to do that while on the faculty market](#)
- Consider your funding and graduation timeline
 - Have frank conversations with mentors, when possible
- Take care of yourself & seek support
 - <https://go.illinois.edu/gradcareersappt>

Individual Career Advising

Application document review, interview preparation, negotiation strategy, career exploration, job search strategy

Sign up for an appointment at:

go.illinois.edu/GradCareersAppt

This Fall: Faculty Job Search Series

Wednesdays from 4:00-5:00 PM at Grad College 202 or <https://go.grad.illinois.edu/eventspace>

- 8/31: CVs
- 9/7: Cover Letters
- 9/14: Research Statements
- 9/21: Teaching & Diversity Statements
- 9/28: Faculty Interviews
- 10/5: Negotiation
- **New! 11/16: Dual Career Considerations**

Questions?

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